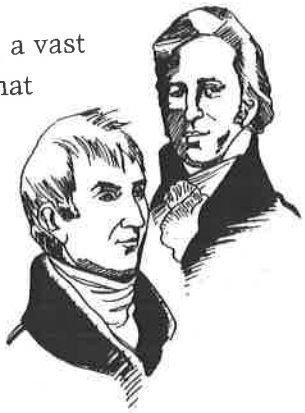
★ NONFICTION ★

The Lewis and Clark Expedition



In 1803 the United States purchased France's Louisiana Territory, a vast area between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. That same year, U.S. President Thomas Jefferson asked Meriwether Lewis to lead an expedition through these little-known lands and on to the Pacific Ocean. He wanted a detailed account of the region's geography, plants, animals, and Native American tribes. He also hoped to locate a continuous water route to the Pacific.

Lewis, his co-captain William Clark, and a crew of over 40 men began their journey into the wilderness on May 14, 1804. Starting near St. Louis, they headed up the Missouri River in two canoes and a large keelboat. Pestered by mosquitoes and ticks, the men traveled up the river, making excursions on land and recording their observations in journals. They ate roasted beaver tail, slept in tents, and often struggled upstream against strong river currents.

On August 3 Lewis and Clark held their first official meeting with Native Americans at Council Bluffs in present-day Nebraska. Sitting down with members of the Missouri and Oto tribes, they gave out presents and told the tribesmen of their **benevolent** "great father" in Washington, D.C., who wanted to be their friend. Moving on through the Great Plains, the group saw huge buffalo herds and had a threatening encounter with the powerful Lakota tribe.

The explorers spent the bitterly cold winter at Fort Mandan, a camp they had built in what is now North Dakota. In early April, when the Missouri River was no longer frozen over, part of the group started back to St. Louis in the keelboat packed with plant, rock, and animal specimens for the President. Included was a live prairie dog. The rest of the group, now in eight canoes, continued west. With them was a young Shoshone woman named Sacagawea.

By June this group had reached the Great Falls of the Missouri, around which they had to lug their canoes and supplies. Menaced by rattlesnakes and grizzly bears, they took nearly a month to make their way. In August they came to the area from which Sacagawea had been stolen when she was a child. Hoping to trade for horses for their journey across the steep Rocky Mountains, the men held a meeting at Camp Fortunate with Cameahwait, a Shoshone chief. When Sacagawea arrived to act as their **interpreter**, she burst into tears. Cameahwait was her long-lost brother.

After an exhausting trip across the Rockies, the explorers rested by the Clearwater River in present-day Idaho. Once again able to travel by boat, they moved swiftly downstream on the Clearwater, sometimes upsetting their canoes in **treacherous** rapids. In mid-October they reached the Columbia River where they were greeted by the Wanapam Indians. One month later, having traveled over 4,000 miles in 18 months, Lewis and Clark and their companions arrived on the coast of the Pacific.

COMPREHENSION CHECK

1. **The eastern and western boundaries of the Louisiana Territory were**
   - ❍ **A.** the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains.
   - ❍ **B.** the Rocky Mountains and the Columbia River.
   - ❍ **C.** the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains.
   - ❍ **D.** the Mississippi River and the Great Plains.

2. **In paragraph three, the "great father" is described as <u>benevolent</u>. Which of these is the best synonym for *benevolent*?**
   - ❍ **A.** impatient ❍ **B.** strict ❍ **C.** kind ❍ **D.** bashful

3. **Why did the explorers stay at Fort Mandan until early April?**
   - ❍ **A.** They were waiting for more supplies to arrive from St. Louis.
   - ❍ **B.** They were waiting for Sacagawea to join them.
   - ❍ **C.** They were waiting for instructions and directions from Thomas Jefferson.
   - ❍ **D.** They were waiting for the ice on the Missouri River to melt.

4. **Sacagawea began to cry when she came into the meeting with Cameahwait because**
   - ❍ **A.** she was afraid that he would try to steal her.
   - ❍ **B.** she was upset at being the only woman in the meeting.
   - ❍ **C.** Cameahwait had refused to trade horses for the explorers' goods.
   - ❍ **D.** she realized that Cameahwait was her brother.

5. **Lewis and Clark often needed someone to act as an <u>interpreter</u> when they had meetings and conversations with Native Americans. An *interpreter* is someone who**
   - ❍ **A.** entertains with drumming and singing performances.
   - ❍ **B.** translates or changes words from one language into another language.
   - ❍ **C.** is an expert on plants and animals.
   - ❍ **D.** serves drinks and snacks to guests.

6. **According to this passage, with which of these Native American tribes did the explorers have a threatening encounter?**
   - ❍ **A.** the Lakota tribe ❍ **B.** the Shoshone tribe
   - ❍ **C.** the Wanapam tribe ❍ **D.** the Oto tribe

7. **In the last paragraph, the rapids in the Clearwater River are described as <u>treacherous</u>. Which of these is the best antonym for *treacherous*?**
   - ❍ **A.** safe ❍ **B.** warm ❍ **C.** rough ❍ **D.** muddy

8. **Based on what you read in this passage, which of these statements is NOT true?**
   - ❍ **A.** The keelboat was sent back to St. Louis from Fort Mandan.
   - ❍ **B.** The expedition reached the coast of the Pacific Ocean in mid-November 1805.
   - ❍ **C.** The explorers traveled on a continuous water route from the Missouri River to the Pacific.
   - ❍ **D.** It took the explorers nearly a month to travel around the Great Falls.

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